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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the content of individual forensic events ballots. In the study, 150 high school and 274 college ballots were randomly selected from 17 tournaments, and each comment on each ballot was evaluated and coded. Data indicated that the overwhelming majority of comments on high-school ballots (64.57%) were positive comments; 32.68% of the comments on the college ballots were positive, and 24.13% of the comments were negative, none of which offer constructive or specific criticisms. A series of response papers comment on the results of the study: (1) Craig Brown argues that high school coaches should judge more and take the burden off lay volunteers who do not always offer instructive comments, and for college ballots, takes exception to the study's categorization that positive and negative comments are not useful; (2) Przybylo notes that college and high school ballots lack constructive comments, lack quality and lack justification of rank; (3) Celeste Devore is not surprised by the results of the study, and suggests that specific attention be given to a justification for rank on ballots; and (4) Bob Betts uses Przybylo's experiences in coaching at the college level to answer the question of how to improve the quality of Individual Events ballots. (RS)

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The High School & College/University Individual Events Judge's Ballot: A Quantitative Analysis of Current Ballot Content and Approaches.

By Jeff Przybylo
Northwest Missouri State University.

ED 386 777

Most Individual Events coaches are familiar with the following scene. It is Monday afternoon (or a van ride home) and students are reading their ballots. Some of them are nearly blank. Most have no constructive advice. Others are very complimentary, but have low ranks ("Great Job" rank-6). The student comes to the coach and says, "I do not understand why I received these ranks. There is nothing here that tells me how I can improve." Quite often the coach is at a loss for a response. Other times the coach feels guilty because the ballots they wrote the past weekend were not much better. This may sound like a sweeping generalization about IE ballots, but it is not. The great majority of ballots currently being written lack constructive criticism and justification of ranking. The irony of the situation is that these items seem to be what students crave the most.

Ballots serve are large role in the educational process of college forensic students. They are not just a method of deciding who gets what trophy. They are a tool for improvement. And in terms of competition they are a means of explaining WHY a student was ranked as they were.

The purpose of the current research is aimed at proving that many judges on the college and high school level are writing sub-par ballots, discuss why this is occurring, and to provide suggestions for improvement.

METHOD

150 high school and 274 college ballots were randomly selected for this research. The high school ballots were obtained from 3 tournaments in each of the following states: Missouri, Iowa, and, Kansas. The College ballots were obtained from 2 tournaments in Illinois, 1 in Minnesota, 2 in Nebraska, 1 in Kansas, and 2 in Missouri. All ballots were written between September 1993 and March of 1995. Nearly equal amounts of ballots were selected from each state. No judge was represented more than once in each sample. Each comment on each individual ballot was evaluated by two teams of coders and put into on of 7 categories or types of comments. The final results were consistent among the teams (+or- 3%) The types are as follows:

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DEFINITION OF TYPES OF COMMENTS USED IN PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

Positive Comments (PC)- Positive comments are those that praise the student's work, but are not specific or constructive. They are quite often very short.

EXAMPLES: *Good job
*Great introduction
*Nice work
*Solid transitions

Positive Constructive Comments (PCC)-Positive constructive comments are those that complement or praise the student's work, but unlike positive comments are specific or provide constructive advice.

EXAMPLES: *You do a nice job supporting your speech. Your sources are very credible.
*Your introduction sets up the speech well, especially your creative preview.
*It is obvious that you have put in a great deal of work. Tighten up your second point and this speech will be even stronger than it already is.
*Your transitions make this speech very easy to follow.

Negative Comments (NC)-Negative comments criticize, are discouraging, are not constructive and are not specific. In fact, they are often destructive.

EXAMPLES: *This speech stinks.
*Introduction is not effective.
*You have a lot of work to do.
*Need transitions.

Negative Constructive Comments(NCC)-Negative constructive Comments are of a negative nature but are encouraging, specific, constructive and end on a positive note.

EXAMPLES: *Your preview & transitions are very confusing. They hurt the overall effect of your speech. Rethink these areas and your speech will be greatly improved.
*Your introduction does not establish social relevancy. Give this aspect some thought and your introduction will be very effective.
*It appears that your need to put a bit more time into the delivery of this speech. work on more confident memorization, slow the pace down, and vary your volume for emphasis. These improvements will make this speech very effective.
*Your quick delivery pace makes some of your words hard to hear. Slow down so we can hear this well written speech.

Personal Comments(PER)-Personal comments are those not associated with the speech or the performance.

EXAMPLES: *Congratulations on making finals.
*Those are neat shoes.
*Tell your sister I said, "Hello".
*I love this play.

Justification of Rank (JOR)- Justification of rank comments explain to the student why they received the rank and/or rate that they received.

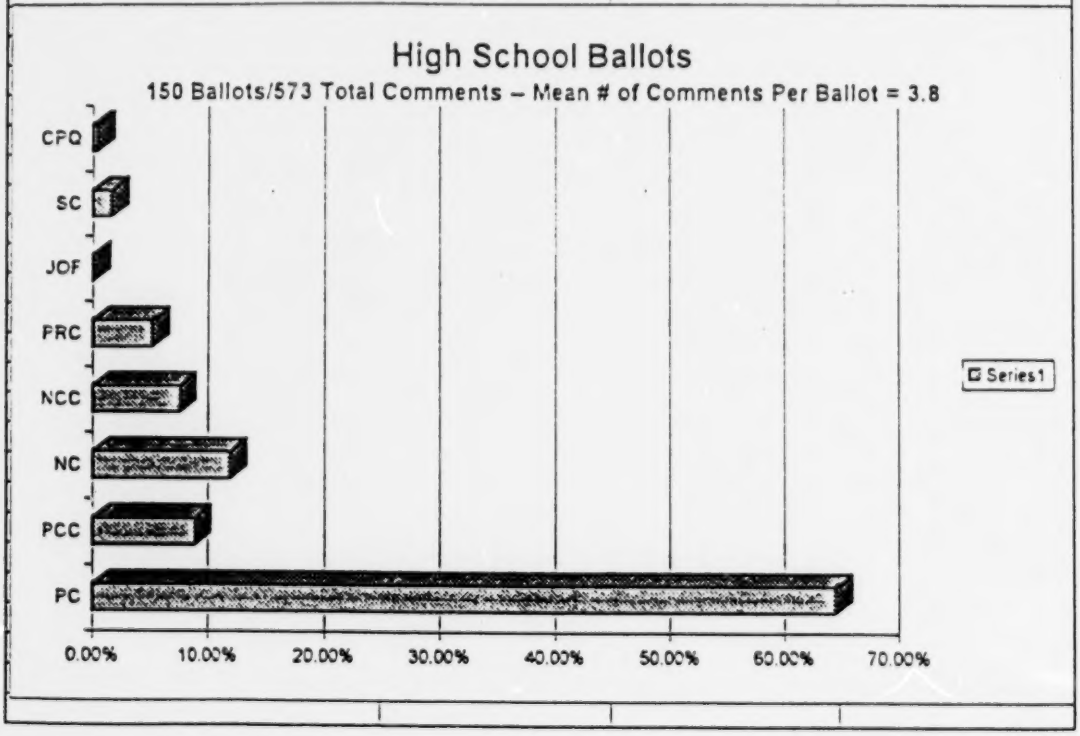
EXAMPLES: *The top two were close. I gave you second because your topic was not as socially relevant as John Smith's.
*Your poor memorization and lack of research forced me to rank you as fourth in this particular round.
*John Smith's and your speech were both equally well written, however I could not overlook the significant amount of stumbles in your delivery.

Sloppy Comment (SC)-A sloppy comment is one in which the penmanship is so poor that the comment can not be read.

Comments Phrased as Questions(CPQ)- Questions to the student for the purpose of motiving the student to think more about a certain aspect of their speech.

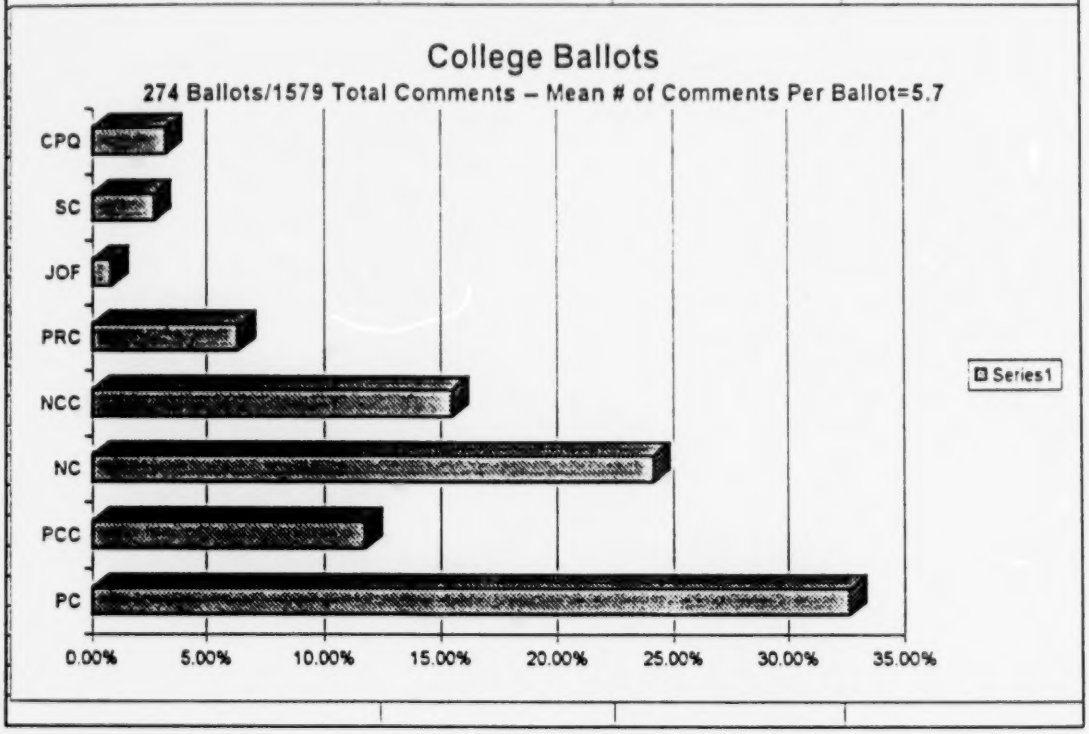
EXAMPLES: *Why is your introduction so brief?
*Have you ever thought about re-cutting this piece?
*Why does the doctor character speak so softly?
*Do you think that your second solution is realistic?

HIGH SCHOOL BALLOTS			
Comments	#Possible	#This Type	% of Total
PC	573	370	64.57%
PCC	573	51	8.90%
NC	573	69	12.04%
NCC	573	43	7.50%
PRC	573	29	5.06%
JOF	573	0	0.00%
SC	573	9	1.57%
CPQ	573	2	0.35%



PC = Positive Comment
PCC = Positive Constructive Comment
NC = Negative Comment
NCC = Negative Constructive Comment
PRC = Personal Comment
JOF = Justification of Rank
CPQ = Comment Phrased as a Question
SC = Sloppy Comment

COLLEGE BALLOTS			
Comments	#Possible	#This Type	% of Total
PC	1579	516	32.68%
PCC	1579	186	11.78%
NC	1579	381	24.13%
NCC	1579	245	15.52%
PRC	1579	101	6.40%
JOF	1579	13	0.82%
SC	1579	43	2.72%
CPQ	1579	51	3.23%



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DISCUSSION

The following pages contain reactions and discussion of this research by:

Craig Brown- Director of Forensics At Kansas State University

Jeff Przybylo- Assistant Director of Forensics at Northwest Missouri State University

Celeste Devore- Assistant Director of Forensics at The University of Northern Iowa

Robert Betts- Director of Forensics at RockVally Community College

Response and Discussion by Craig Brown
Director of Individual Events
Kansas State University

In my mind, the nature of ballot writing in high school and collegiate contests differs considerably. So I would like to split my responses and comments between the two areas, based on the data from this study.

High School Ballots

The mean number of comments and the preponderance of Positive Comments on high school ballots doesn't surprise me. I think it points to several features of high school competition that bear discussing.

First, I am interpreting these results as reflecting the large number of judges without experience on the high school circuit. The traditional joke is that one of your judges in high school will be the bus driver. So it is not surprising that there are few comments and that those comments are dominated by essentially feel-good-but-useless comments. Based on my experiences in Kansas and Missouri, the vast majority of judges during the regular season are not well versed in what is going on. At the most, they are parents who will judge three times over three years until their child graduates from high school.

Two things could be done to help. Obviously, judging clinics before the tournament would help. I know some high schools do this. But based on the data, either they are not doing it enough, or they are doing it poorly.

However, I would think the main improvement could be easily made by having more high school coaches actually judge. Because I am used to the college norms, I expect to judge at tournaments. But in my experience, most high school coaches don't judge and actively avoid it.

For example, when teaching in Missouri at a regional university, I was advised that we probably shouldn't offer to host a tournament since we wouldn't have enough judges. When I pointed out that number of coaches that could judge, I was immediately corrected by a current high school coach and a former coach. "We don't judge."

I could surmise various reasons for this, but none that are persuasive. Only in high school forensics is our judging pool dominated by lay volunteers. We use music instructors for music contests, certified scorers for gymnastics and state accredited referees for basketball and football. But in forensics, we will take almost any warm body off the street. We wait until districts, state or nationals before we start to insure an adequate pool of judges.

The message we are sending is that the regular season isn't as important, so why should the ballots be as important?

Maybe this is not the norm in other states. I hope not. but if we are really concerned with improving the quality of judging and ballot comments, I would encourage coaches to get out of the lounge and judge. Lay judges are wonderful volunteers, but as the data indicates, their ballots are not as instructive as they could be.

Of course, one way to test this assumption would be to run this study again either in a state where coaches judge a lot, or at a tournament that makes an effort to have a qualified judging pool. But until then, my assumption is that coaches would write better ballots and so they should naturally judge more than they do on the high school circuit.

College Ballots

I have to admit, when I first heard of the study and again when I perused the results, my reaction was, "Please don't use that one ballot I wrote. It was a late round at the end of a long swing and I was tired and cranky." Just like our students aren't always proud of their performances, I am sure we are not always proud of our ballots. Any attempt to examine our ballot writing with the intent of improving the experience is to be commended. I am glad Jeff Przybylo and John Rude initiated this study.

However, I would like to offer a counterpoint to their assumption that ballot comments aren't useful. Appreciated in context, most ballots are useful and the current push for a justification of ranking, while good intentioned, is not the cure all that it seems.

First, there are some problems with the assumptions made about the usefulness of the categories. The study assumes that Positive Comments (PC), Negative Comments (NC) and Comments Phrased as Questions (CPQ) are not constructive. The implication is that these comments are not useful.

The problem that I have with this assumption is that it takes comments purely at face value. However, I think an honest ballot reading gets a lot more from these comments than their face value.

For example, "Great introduction," tells me that the judge liked, and depending on how they wrote the comment, even loved the intro. Yes, the judge didn't give specifics, but maybe the judge didn't have specifics. The same with the "Introduction is not effective," comment. We know that we have a problem. Based on what we know of what works and doesn't work, a particular judge's likes and dislikes, or even the vagaries of the performance in that round, I assume that my students and I can figure out what needs help or what we are doing right.

In other words, I look at ballot comments and read between the lines. I encourage the competitors to do so as well. Because of time, tact, lack of tact and an inability to express in detail a comment, I don't expect all comments to fall into the Positive or Negative Constructive Comments (PCC or NCC) categories. So we read between the lines.

The CPQs are an excellent example of this. All four examples listed are indicating a problem with the performance or text. And even more importantly, they may be examples of people trying to tactfully criticize. I know that I use qualifiers to tone down the nature of comments all of the time. Instead of saying, "This needs more evidence," I often would write, "This needs a bit more evidence." The distinction is subtle, but it reflects a tone that I am trying to convey. In that respect, CPQs can be seen as a way to make a suggestion without it sounding like an order.

This becomes especially relevant when we consider how many of our students react to criticism that is not flattering. It is so easy to get ego involved with the comments you receive. However, most judges don't mean the comments to be taken personally. So one way to avoid that problem is to qualify comments in some way. And when I interpret ballots, I often see CPQs that way.

However, the one big difference that I stress between high school and college is the issue of maturity and ballots. If you want to get better, you need negative comments. I would hope that they are expressed tactfully, but I know that under the heat of the moment, they sometimes aren't. But again, we need to read between the lines and take the ballots in context.

So when faced with NCs, I am not always sure they are destructive. I would never write "This speech stinks," and I would consider it destructive. But sometimes students need a raw dose of reality and I would have no problem with the other three NC examples listed.

For example, at nationals we had a ballot essentially repeating the "You have a lot of work to do" comment. Since this was an individual who was not word-for-word memorized, and who was shaky at times in how they extemped the prepared event, I was glad to see the comment. It wasn't necessarily nice, but it was appropriate and accurate. In context, the comment was useful to me as a coach.

I hate "Good Job-6" ballots as much as the next person. But I am not so sure that the majority of our ballots are as useless as we may think. The main problem with the way students use ballots, in my opinion, is that they are looking for proof that they are excellent performers or that the judge who screwed them is an idiot.

As much as the nature of ballot comments are a problem, we cannot discount how we choose to read those comments.

Second, JOF, or justification of rank, will not automatically erase all doubt for the student. While I generally like a JOF on the ballot, it is rare that I really think that there was one thing that made a difference. As subjective as forensics is, I honestly believe that most ranking are due to multiple-causality. Now I can put one thing that made a difference, but doest that really help?

If anything, it can mislead a competitor to think, "Ok, he wanted more sources in my extemp, I'll give him more and I'll win the round." However, maybe the source issue was one of several concerns. Or even more likely, the next time around, there may be another problem that has nothing to do with sources.

While I understand the attractiveness of JOFs, I think they also are an over-simplification of what happens in a round with six different competitors. They can be useful, but they should not be seen as the answer for students. Ballots are best appreciated holistically. In fact, I try not to get that excited in general over any one ballot or even one tournament. I think taking the long view is ultimately the more useful course.

Summary

Maybe it is because I am basically an optimist and because I see our collegiate ballots in comparison to high school ballots, but I generally don't have a problem with the bulk of ballots I read. There is always room for improvement. I know that I always have a round or two where I almost want to apologize and explain my ballots. And if nothing else, I believe research of this nature makes us more aware of how our ballots are received. But when assessing the current state of IE ballots, I am on the whole comfortable.

Still I do have three suggestions. First, if you have assistant coaches, talk to them about their ballots. Help them write the kind of ballots you would want to receive. When I was in grad school, none of my "bosses" ever talked about ballots. We are teaching the future generation of coaches, and we should include ballots as part of the curriculum.

Second, talk to students about how to read ballots and then how to write them when they judge high school tournaments and/or college tournaments. Sometimes, collegiate competitors write the meanest high school ballots. We can do something to help deter this.

And finally, we should keep talking formally like this session and informally at tournaments. That's where we find out what someone really meant and we discover that one of our comments was misunderstood. By keeping this discussion alive among ourselves, we can create truly useful and educational ballots and everyone will benefit as a result.

DISCUSSION/REACTION.

JEFF PRZYBYLO
NORTHWEST MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY

I was not surprised by the results of this study. In fact, these anticipated results were the reason I initiated this research. My reaction will address first, the problems that this research seems to point to, second, what I believe may be contributing factors to these problems, and finally some suggestions for overall ballot writing improvement.

On the college circuit, I see a lack of effort to make constructive comments (those that suggest HOW to improve or WHY something is "great"). I do realize that non-constructive comments (PC & NC) can be valuable, but currently judges depend upon them far too much. They are quite often vague or used to just "fill space". I would rather read a ballot with one strong constructive comment that can help my student improve his/her speech, than one with 10 comments that are "fluff" or vaguely negative. It seems that in some cases judges are more concerned with filling the ballot than with helping the student. Quite often judges have lost sight of what we are here for and that is to share our expertise with students. In addition, a lack of justification or rank (JOR) is obvious. If one was to ask any forensics student what they want to see on a ballot, I would guess that 90% would reply, " I want to know why I received this rank." JOR would satisfy this need. I realize that there is much more to ballot writing than JOR, but it should be included. It is what our students want. I do not understand why there is such a resistance to this. I have even received ballots that ask for JOR with that spot left blank. Overall, on the college circuit I see a lack of constructive comments, a lack of concern for quality, and a lack of JOR .

On the high school circuit, the problem seems obvious. A lack of quality, a lack of quantity, and an over abundance of fluff. The results of this study prove all three. 65% of high school comments are positive and non-constructive (fluff). I call these fluff because they just passify the students. They do not suggest improvement. In addition, the average number of comments is 3.8 per ballot. It seems that high school judges just want to get home. They make a few comments that tell the student what was "nice" and then move on. They do not provide suggestion for improvement, JOR, or negative reactions. All three of which would enhance the education of high school students and make them more effective communicators.

In my eyes, there seems to be three major causes for these problems. Our judges are often lazy, they are often poorly trained, and there is a lack of discussion about these issues. I know we all have had bad days or late rounds when our ballots are sub-par, but the results of this study indicate that this is not the exception. It seems to me that

there are not enough judges that put in an exceptional effort. Our students deserve exceptional ballots. In addition, there is not enough of an effort to train our judges. It is the responsibly of the tournament directors make sure judges know what is expected of them. And it is not just hired judges. I believe that there is not enough discussion among coaches and graduate assistants concerning what is expected of them. This all relates to the lack of discussion on this issue. When a person says, "O' yes, I can judge for you," we assume they are going to be responsible and that they know what they are doing. This is not the case. We discuss and complain among our own teams, but rarely do we express our concerns to tournament directors and coaches that hire and train judges.

The situation is not bleak. Overall, the state of ballot writing is not at an "all time low". However, problems do exist. The following are suggestion to improve ballot writing. They will by no means solve every problem, but are proposed as suggestions to push thing is the right direction.

1. When we organize tournaments print "Justification of Rank" at the bottom of the ballot. This will force judges to provide students with the main reasons why they finished the way that they did in the round. This will also force lay judges to give more thought to their rankings. The mere fact that they are asked to justify the rank may motivate them to give their rank more thought.

2. Every tournament should include a "Hired Judges Meeting". This meeting should be required. Items that should be covered should include: how to fill out the ballot, time signals, time limits, expectations, and issues such as those discussed in this study. I know that many judges put up resistance to these meeting. They should be scheduled right before the first round and should last 15-20 minutes. If we start to include these meeting at all tournaments we can work to make them the norm. At Northwest, we have one at every tournament. They have been brief and extremely beneficial. In fact, I have had many judge thank me for the opportunity to ask questions and inquire about new trends on procedures.

3. As coaches we need to educate the people that we bring to tournament as judges. Parents, grad students, faculty, bus drivers, & alumni that we choose to represent our teams' need to be made aware of what is expected of them on ballots. We need to take responsibility for our judges.

4. High School tournaments should attempt to get away from using parents and bus drives as judges. Get creative. Call local colleges. Quite often they can send college

students from their Forensic Programs or Speech Classes. Contact alumni with forensics experience. Remember all it takes is a little effort.

5. As "hard nosed" as it sounds, you need to consider sending copies of poor ballots back to tournament directors. This is the only way for them to find the problems in their judging pool and correct them. If we know who is not effective as judges, we can work to educate them and turn them into effective and valuable members of the forensics world.

6. Finally, we need to continue to discuss these issues. If we continue to discuss problems with colleagues, we can work towards solving them.

Reaction Paper By Celeste Devore-Northern Iowa

After reviewing the results of this study, my first reaction was that I "was not surprised" by the percentage outcomes. Several ballots that our students and staff read are composed with either positive comments that are not consistent with the rank, or negative comments that only devalue students feelings of worth, and increase problems of confidence.

Because the nature of this activity is both educational and competitive, one would assume that as judges, our criterion for evaluation would be something that balances both of these aspects. Unfortunately, this study provides evidence that the "current state of IE ballots" is not a proactive one, and that we as evaluaters do not have a standard set of criterion when evaluating our students.

Obviously, the evaluation process is subjective, and this will never change. But perhaps we have given the judging community to much "personal freedom. Most ballots leave a large open space for comments, but do not give any suggestions as to "what to write" on the ballots, thus we make comments "how we want to without any set standard. However, the positive side to the current status of ballot construction is that it creates a sense of variety and allows students to see the wide range of preferences by judges.

In theory, the most effective ballots are those that prescribe a change which would advise the student on how to enhance his/her performance. I would argue that this proactive approach is not utilized as often due to the fact that constructive criticism is a difficult process. It takes time, and it takes much more concentration on the judge's part. Perhaps with the intensity of schedules and the lack of knowledge combined create a situation where some judges do not have the ability to advocate change on the ballots.

In addition, as a coach, what disturbs me the most when "reading student ballots is when I come across one that is either all positive or negative, but does absolutely nothing to help the student grow. What is most distressful is when these ballot types seem to always appear with our "less talented" students. But stop and think about the last time you judged someone who was not as talented as you would have liked. Perhaps the performer was just boring. Consider the types of comments you made to that person. Consider how much time you spent trying to help that person grow. Now, compare your ballot for that less talented speaker, to the ballot you wrote for last year's National Champion in After Dinner Speaking. Did you feel yourself having to "work" a little harder in your comments? Did you feel yourself wanting to justify any negative criticism?

I know that I have "worked" a lot harder for someone I am evaluating who has proven their talents. However, it seems so ironic that the students who seem to need the most criticism are the ones whose ballots are often ambiguous, general and even rude at times, creating more harm than good.

It is obvious that some changes need to occur. Specific attention is given to the notion of "justification for rank" which seems to be part of the researchers' suggestion for changing the current state of IE ballots. I have mixed reviews for justification of rank. I believe that if judges do "their jobs" the reason for rank should be clearly understood on the ballot. Symbols by certain comments or underlining sentences can

also give students an indication as to what comments were the most important.

I am not an advocate of creating a space on the ballot that states: please indicate reason for rank because I feel like a am only repeating my comments from before and thus focusing on the quantity of comments as opposed to the quality. I do believe that in order to improve the current state of IE ballots, it lies in the responsibility of each university or college. A ballot is a representation of your institution s forensic philosophy.

A part of this representation comes from any hired judges we utilize, either when hosting a tournament, or bringing one along with our teams when we travel. Hired judges are often stereotyped as "inexperienced. Although at times we may become desperate enough to grab the department's custodian to judge a round, the screening of hired judges needs to be a very specific process. If the judges have limited experience, we need to focus on the types of comments we want representing our universities and colleges. We could even give them examples of what our staff considers "a bad ballot" and "a good ballot" from actual ballots students have received.

This past semester our team traveled to Hipon Wisconsin s first tournament. About three days after we got home, their Director of Forensics sent out to every school attending a post -tournament review. Although the purpose of this review was to obtain feedback because it was their first tournament , I really liked the idea of reviewing specific aspects of the tournament, like the judging pool. An effective way to see if people attending your tournaments were happy with the ballots would be to conduct a post-tournament review that focuses on the judges and ballots.

In summary, there is obviously concern for the state of IE ballots in our forensic community. This study indicates that we as a community simply need to review what the importance of a ballot is and how we want our university or college to be represented. I do believe that the most effective strategy available for student growth is to pose questions to students on ballots, especially after a negative comment. It allows the student to think critically about their own performance and forces them to make specific choices giving them something specific to consider.

THE LACK OF CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM IN COLLEGE AND HIGH SCHOOL INDIVIDUAL EVENTS BALLOTS

BOB BETTS
ROCK VALLEY COLLEGE

As coaches, one of the most frustrating moments occurs when a student receives a low rank with little or no reason for the rank. There is no direction given to improve the event, and the student is uncertain on what to work on in order to go to the next level. Unfortunately, I have found this to be a common occurrence with ballots at tournaments across the nation (including nationals). Lost in the competitive spirit of who gets the "1" is how these students can improve. This is supposed to be the point of Forensics competition. In this paper I will use my own experiences in coaching at Illinois State University and now Rock Valley College to answer the question, "How can we improve the quality of Individual Events ballots."

The results of this research were not at all surprising when looking at the number of comments given. The research showed that on college ballots, there were just under six given per ballot. I think a study of the "coach judges" would show on average a few more comments, and a few less for hired judges. One of the really important issues here is the screening of hired judges. There are some outstanding hired judges which were either former competitors, former coaches, or both. In many cases however, individuals who don't really understand the activity are asked to judge because the Director of Forensics is having a tough time finding enough hired judges. We all face this problem, and with a bit better prior planning can improve the quality. As for the mean number of comments, this often depends on who the judge is, or in other words, what was the quality of these comments?

In looking further at the research, there are a couple of reasons for the low numbers on constructive comments. The first may be a problem with time constraints. Many tournaments leave little time for error as far as time goes. I never have the time to write all the constructive things I want to write- especially in an event like Communication Analysis. Judges need to pick their spots so that the speaker can get at least decent eye contact from them, but still receive a good ballot. Secondly, I think some judges (especially hired) are unsure how to improve an event. They have a sense for who has the strongest delivery, but beyond that there is uncertainty. This poses a problem sense delivery and content should be judged in my opinion. It seems that some judges write enough negative comments on a ballot to justify the rank of "4". Again, the student is not helped at all by this type of procedure.

This brings up the question on whether a judge at a speech tournament should be more interested in quality or quantity? In my mind, this is kind of a false dichotomy.

You can have both. There is no reason why you cannot write quality comments and still "fill up an entire ballot." I find it ridiculous that people have trouble writing comments on both sides of a ballot. I find at least half of my students ballots consisting of comments only on the front side. There is no reason that we cannot achieve both the quality of ballots we want and a strong number of comments on each sheet.

Unfortunately it is hard to have the quality that we want without a justification of rank. There have been some movements to require a justification of rank, but each time it seems to go away, or doesn't catch on everywhere. The problem is that many judges argue their comments justify rank. From my experience, this just is not the case. Even constructive comments on a ballot don't let the student know where they were in relation to others in the round. A justification of rank lets the student think back to the round and think about the things they did which caused them to be ranked down. This forces judges to have criteria with which they base their decision. Yes, there will still be differing criterion for who gets the "1" in various events, but at least the student knows next time what you are looking for. This makes the judges job more difficult after the round to actually articulate <u>why</u> a student received a certain rank, but this extra time is necessary if we really believe Forensics is an educational activity.

Even more difficult than jumping on the "Justification Bandwagon" is determining <u>how</u> it can be implemented. I believe there really has to be a national movement to require it on ballots. I hate prescription as much as the next person, but this will really help the quality of ballots received. Even if individual tournaments refused to take ballots without a reason for rank, a trend may begin. It will be tough to make it a requirement for ballots nationally, but if we sell it as an aid to students, what coach can argue against it.

On the flip side of the justification of rank controversy, many judges write comments which were labeled in this research as strictly positive or negative? These comments are not constructive, but rather, praise students (positive comments) or tell students they don't like some part of what they are doing (negative comments). It would be easy to say that these comments have no place in Forensics, but that is simply not the case. Especially with Novice competitors, simple praise from a judge who can tell they are new really helps. We all know how are students are, and especially with the beginning competitor, she/he just wants to know that they are improving. In this way, positive comments serve a vital function to enhance the self esteem of young students. A series of positive comments followed by the rank is just ridiculous and unprofessional. I don't think most positive comments are used in that vein however.

The negative comments have a purpose also, as long as they don't have a nasty tone. I often find ballots from

coaches or hired judges who write to students as if they are the "heartbeat of Forensics." Any ballot which serves as a "let me tell you what Forensics is" lesson to students is worthless. If they are doing impromptu and you want to suggest Unified Analysis instead of an Example Speech, that is fine, but asking them "How in the world did you come up with that intro" is out of bounds. It is all in the spirit of the ballot. We all want to see our students improve, and differing opinions help that happen. Thrashing a student for 10 minutes to prove how Forensics Educated one is shows a lack of character and compassion however. At their best, Negative comments can alert students to what parts of their event are not "up to snuff."

Another type of comment that is different from the Constructive Criticism on ballots is the Personal Comment. When first thinking about this I thought "I often don't like them, no way." I then started to think about my ballots though. When I really like a piece someone is doing, or a topic they've selected, I let them know. I often congratulate a student (especially a Novice) for making a final round also. Because this is a communication activity, judged by faculty members who teach this, personal comments are going to happen- this is a very expressive fraternity. Furthermore, the human element is always involved. We are all fascinated by different elements of public address, limited prep, and interpretation. When a student really connects with you or chooses a topic or script you like, it's natural to make a comment.

Overall, I find the current state of Individual Events ballots to be "hit and miss." I find myself hoping that early in the year my students get to see judges I really respect so that they can get those quality ballots. Early in the year I just want them to find out if the topic or piece works, and how they can communicate it better to the audience. I have found myself in the past couple of years getting really annoyed at how limited prep events across the nation are judged. I am a major advocate of Unified Analysis in Impromptu and Extemp... even if students do not follow that format I want them to ANALYZE the quotation (impromptu) or question (extemp). I find many judges who are extremely happy to reward a "canned" example speech over and over. This is really distressing to me, as I try to convince my students that a strong analysis and solid delivery is the answer. Along those same lines, I don't see how someone can judge Communication Analysis and reward a high rank to a "Crit" with great delivery but no real analysis or weak rhetorical conclusions. Overall, the strong judges continue to help students self-esteem as well as their speaking skills. It seems impossible to bring everyone up to speed however because judging is still subjective-- how can someone say that their criteria for decision in After Dinner is better than someone elses...no matter how strongly you believe that is true.

The only real way to improve the situation is to

establish criteria for each Individual Event. The problem is that others will still weigh some criteria above others so it seems pointless. The more regulation put on ballots, the more it hurts the spontaneity of the activity also. The truth is that this is still the most fulfilling activity offered at our colleges and universities. There is no athletic director or campus administrator that could make me see otherwise. The beauty of this activity still lives, and with the institution not of many prescriptive rules, but simply, justification of rank, I think we make a good thing better. It will be better from the students perspective first and foremost... after all, they are the reason we're here.

HIGH SCHOOL COMMENTS

The findings on high school ballots were not surprising either. From my experience, I think this problem is much worse in High School because the quality of judging is not as strong. There are many people who are judging and coaching High School Forensics who are English people, just beginning to learn the activity. I think High School Forensics is much more an activity to build self-esteem since it is such a trying time in the students' lives. This explains the large percentage of positive comments uncovered in this analysis. High school coaches and hired judges rarely justify rank so that finding made a lot of sense to me. I think more workshops to train high school coaches and judges would help the activity greatly. As with anything, the more educated the coaches in a certain region become, the more their students can learn from Forensics.